

Appendix 2 - Community Engagement Toolkit

This document forms part of Bromsgrove District Council's Community Engagement Strategy 2008-09 and is designed to assist you in planning and undertaking your community engagement activity. The guidance is intended to help officers uphold the principles of community engagement described in the Community Engagement Strategy.

The Corporate Communications, Policy and Performance Team can offer further advice and guidance on community engagement issues, including planning and scheduling, selecting appropriate methodologies, identifying participants and accessing existing networks and forums. The team can also provide practical support for the development, implementation and analysis of community engagement activities. Major activities will be identified in advance through the Council's business planning process. These are shown in Appendix 2 – Annual Community Engagement Plan

Community engagement is all about listening to and respecting the views of other people, even if they are contrary to those you wish to hear. In order for it to be effective, community engagement needs to be well planned and executed. If it is not thought through it can be expensive and time-consuming and will have a detrimental effect. It will not always give you the answers you want and it may raise expectations that you cannot meet. Nonetheless, community engagement is a crucial element of a participatory democracy and must be conducted so that elected Members can base their decisions on robust evidence gathered from the communities they serve.

To help officers incorporate community engagement into all areas of service design and delivery, the following table should be used. This table has been taken from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence's Community Engagement guidance and covers four interlocking themes: **prerequisites for success** (incorporating policy development); **infrastructure** (to support practice on the ground); **approaches** (to support and increase levels of community engagement); and **evaluation**. It is crucial to ensure that all the prerequisites are implemented before selecting individual recommendations from the remaining sections of the table.

Recommendation	Action
PREREQUISITES	
1. Policy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan, design and coordinate activities that incorporate a community involvement component across, as well as within, departments. • Take account of existing community activities and area-based initiatives, past experiences and issues raised by the communities involved.
2. Long-term investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the gradual, incremental and long-term nature of community engagement activities. Ensure mechanisms are in place to evaluate and learn from these processes on a continuing, systematic basis. • Align this long-term approach with local priorities. • Identify how to fund community engagement activities and identify lines of accountability. This could include

Recommendation	Action
	<p>arrangements for multiple funding sources. It may also include funds for shorter term activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set realistic timescales for the involvement of local communities and plan activities within the available funding. Recognise that a short term focus on activities and area-based initiatives can undermine efforts to secure long term and effective community participation. • Building past experiences to mitigate the possibility of communities experiencing consultation fatigue. • Agree and be clear about how community engagement can influence decision-making and or lead to improved services. • Negotiate with all those involved to determine which community engagement approaches are most appropriate for different stages of the initiative. • Clearly state the intended outcomes of the activity.
<p>3. Organisation and cultural change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the target community to identify how the culture of public sector organisations supports or prevents community engagement. Make any necessary changes (e.g. to the performance management framework) to encourage successful engagement. • Acknowledge the skills and acknowledge in the community by encouraging local people to help identify priorities and contribute to the commissioning, design and delivery of services. • Draw on the expertise of the particular communities concerned. Consider providing diversity training and other activities to raise cultural awareness of the organisation. Do not stereo type the target community or community groups with regard to age, sex/gender, disability, race / ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or belief, or any other characteristic. • Encourage all communities and individuals (including those whose views are less frequently heard) to express their opinions, regardless of whether they disagree, or are dissatisfied with national, regional or local policy and strategy. • Give weight to the views of local communities when decisions affecting them are taken. Make lines of accountability clear so they can see the response to their views. Where community views have been overridden by other concerns, this should be explicitly stated. • Manage conflicts between communities (and within them) and the agencies that serve them.
<p>4. Levels of engagement and power</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify how power is currently distributed among all those involved (including public sector organisations and representatives and individuals from the community). Negotiate and agree with all relevant parties how power will

Recommendation	Action
	<p>be shared and distributed in relation to decision-making, resource allocation and defining project objectives and outcomes. Recognise that ‘power’ takes many forms including: access to and use of data, information and people, responsibility for setting agendas, responsibility for allocating resources and funds, and skills and capacity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make all parties aware of the importance, value and benefit of community involvement in decision-making, service provision and management. This includes public sector organisations and representatives and individuals from the community. • Identify and recognise local diversity and local priorities (both within and between communities). Ensure diverse communities are represented (particularly those that tend to be under-represented). Clearly state the responsibilities of all parties involved and put in place mechanisms to track accountability. • Identify and change practises that can exclude or discriminate against certain sectors of the community (e.g. short term funding, organisational style and timing of meetings). • Let members of the local community decide how willing and able they are to contribute to decision making, service provision and management (recognise that this may change over time). The allocation of responsibilities should match this. Training and support should be available to help all those involved meet their responsibilities. • Recognise that some groups and individuals (from the public, community and voluntary sectors) may have their own agendas and could monopolise groups, so inhibiting community engagement. • Jointly agree ways of working with relevant members of the community at both a strategic and operational level. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identifying who will be involved in decisions concerning the scope, vision and focus of the initiatives ○ Identifying and agreeing project priorities, objectives and outcomes and what can realistically be achieved by involving community members ○ selecting the community engagement approach most likely to achieve the project’s objectives and outcomes ○ agreeing governance structures and systems (including how each party will be represented and involved) ○ agreeing the criteria that will be used to allocate, control and use resources ○ using a variety of methods to elicit the views and concerns of different communities such as black and

Recommendation	Action
	<p>minority ethnic groups, older people and those with disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ agreeing to hold meetings in accessible, suitable venues and timing and conducting them in a way that allows community members to participate fully and is sensitive to their needs(for example, where necessary, translation and other services such as Braille and the loop system should be used or crèche facilities provided) ○ agreeing to avoid technical and professional jargon ○ building feedback mechanisms into the process (to ensure achievements are reported and explanations provided when proposals are not taken forward or outcomes are not achieved).
<p>5. Mutual trust and respect</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learn from and build on previous or existing activities and local people’s experiences to engage them, using existing community networks and infrastructures. ● Identify and provide the structures and resources needed to help community organisations and their representatives participate fully. ● Working with the community, assess its broad and specific needs. In particular, work with groups that may be under-represented and/or with particular needs, such as black and minority ethnic groups, older people, those with disabilities and people living in rural communities. ● Tailor the approach used to involve and reach out to under-represented groups, but respect the rights of individuals and communities not to become involved. Recognise that some individuals or groups may create barriers to community engagement and identify ways to overcome these barriers. ● Negotiate and agree how much control and influence community members have and the commitment required from them (in terms of their time and workload). ● Regularly inform communities about the progress being made to tackle issues of concern. Use mechanisms such as existing community networks or forums.
<p>INFRASTRUCTURE</p>	
<p>6. Training and resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop and build on the local community’s strengths and assets (i.e. its skills, knowledge, talents and capacity). ● Provide public sector agencies and those working with communities (including community representatives and organisations) with the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills they need for community engagement. Where possible, training should be undertaken jointly by all those involved and should cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ organisational change and development

Recommendation	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ community engagement ○ community leadership ○ communication and negotiation (including dealing with conflicts of interest and confidentiality) ○ partnership working and accountability ○ business planning and financial management ○ participatory research and evaluation skills. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide information on the policy context, how public sector organisations work and on other relevant organisational issues. ● Provide opportunities and resources for networking so that all those involved can share their learning and experiences. ● Identify funding sources for community engagement training. ● Identify support for community engagement. This includes working with existing community networks and voluntary organisations that can reach groups that are traditionally under-represented. ● Where necessary, work with local and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and those in the voluntary sector to provide small community organisations with the assistance they need to get involved (this includes the provision of training and resources). ● Address any constraints facing members of the community who want to be involved. This may include helping them to develop knowledge and skills, including the ability to deal with discrimination and stigma. It may also involve dealing with practical issues such as the time they have available, their financial constraints, caring responsibilities or any difficulties they have with transport. ● Provide appropriate, accessible meeting spaces and equipment (such as telephones, computers and photocopying facilities) as required. ● Consider training individual members of the community to act as mentors.
7. Partnership working	<p>Develop statements of partnership working for all those involved (including community groups and individuals). This will help increase knowledge of – and communication between – the sectors and improve the opportunities for joint working and/or consultation on service provision. A compact drawn up between local government and voluntary and community organisations is an example of how this could be achieved.</p>
8. Area-based initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourage local people to be involved in the organisation and management (including financial management) of area-based and regeneration activities, by recognising and developing their skills.

Recommendation	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give community groups the power to influence local authority decisions and regional and national issues related to area-based initiatives. Also give them the power to help improve communication across sectors. Both can be achieved by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ providing resources (such as access to community facilities and help from voluntary and community groups) to support community participation in area-based initiatives ○ involving communities in decision-making and the planning and delivery of services (via structures and mechanisms such as local strategic partnerships, local area agreements and comprehensive area assessments).
APPROACHES	
9. Community members as agents of change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit individuals from the local community to plan, design and deliver activities. These ‘agents of change’ could take on a variety of roles, for example, as peer leaders and educators, community champions, community volunteers or neighbourhood wardens. Where necessary, offer training in how to plan, design and deliver community-based activities. Encourage them to recruit other members of their community to work on community-based interventions (so retaining the skills and knowledge gained within the community). • Encourage local communities to form a group of ‘agents of change’ (or use existing groups) to plan, design and deliver activities. The groups could include neighbourhood or community committees, community coalitions and school councils. • Recruit people to act as a conduit between local communities and organisations in the public, voluntary and community sectors. Ideally, recruit members of the local community. The recruit(s) may be described as neighbourhood managers or something similar. They should work with neighbourhood partnerships, community forums and community representatives to identify local needs in relation to employment, education, training, income, crime and other issues. They also need to help members of the local community to develop their capacity for involvement in community activities. • Use mechanisms such as tenant-controlled organisations, estate housing associations, housing boards and committees, as well as working with neighbourhood managers and renewal advisers to ensure the community’s views are heard including the views of those who are often under-represented). In addition, use these methods to help residents tackle and improve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ housing (reducing repair and re-letting times and

Recommendation	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ improving rent collection) ○ community facilities and youth activities ○ perceptions of the environment and crime (tackling rubbish, graffiti and fly tipping) ○ local service delivery (by improving links and partnership working with the community and across and within sectors).
10. Community workshops	Run community workshops (for example, community arts and health workshops) or similar events. These should be used to identify local community needs and to maintain a high level of local participation in the planning, design, management and delivery activities. The event(s) should be co-managed by professionals and members of the community and held at a local venue.
11. Resident consultancy	<p>Draw on the skills and experience of individuals and groups previously involved in regeneration activities (for example, via resident consultancy initiatives) to improve social cohesion and people's general wellbeing. These skills and experience should be drawn from as wide a range of individuals and groups as possible and used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● engage with local residents and secure their trust ● work 'with' rather than 'for' the local community ● identify and work with local structures and organisations ● offer advice, guidance, mentoring and training, if necessary ● empower local people to build partnerships and run community organisations.
EVALUATION	
12. Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify and agree the objectives of evaluation in collaboration with members of the target community and those involved in the planning, design and implementation of the activity. This should be agreed before the activity is introduced. ● Involve members of the community in the planning, design and, where appropriate, the implementation of an evaluation framework that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ encourages joint development (by commissioners and the local community) of baseline measurement indicators and methods of monitoring the whole activity ○ considers the theory of change required to achieve success ○ embraces a mixed-method approach which uses appropriate research designs according to the questions asked (and makes use of participatory research methods) ○ includes a range of indicators that help to evaluate not only what works but in what context, as well as

Recommendation	Action
	<p>the costs involved and the experiences of those involved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ensures outcomes match the resources available and the time invested in the activity ○ identifies the comparators that will be used (if appropriate).

Community engagement can take many forms, and there must be a common understanding amongst staff, elected Members and the community about the scope of any activity and the degree of influence participants may have when being invited to share their views to help make decisions. Bromsgrove District Council recognises this and has devised the following five categories of community engagement activity:

Description	Definition – the circumstances under which this type of activity would be used	Example of type of activity
Category A: Information gathering	I am testing out satisfaction with services that will inform future planning. I don't need to make a decision now but I am gathering information that I may use later.	Questionnaire on satisfaction with waste recycling
Category B: Seeking Views	We will be making a decision or planning service changes so we are seeking information/your general views to help us make that decision or plan changes	Consultation on a draft strategy before taking the final version to Members
Category C: Making choices	We have a number of options and are seeking your views/ preferences before making a decision. We are taking a 'vote' on options and your preferred option will be reported to the relevant decision making body	Workshop to obtain views on design options for park facilities
Category D: Generating Ideas	We are seeking your views on an issue that is at an early stage. We do not have definite options at this stage, so we want you to help us generate ideas/options so we can jointly identify and agree a way forward	Consultation to identify the locations of community sports equipment across the Borough
Category E: Participation/ Joint Decision Making	Let's jointly agree what needs to happen and how. We will be making decisions together.	Working party to identify suitable amenities and services in a Community Centre.

It is important to remember that Category A is no less valuable or worthy than Category E. This is about what is most relevant/ appropriate to the nature of the work involved.

Consultation techniques that support community engagement

Whilst 'Community Engagement' has replaced 'Consultation' as order of the day, it does not mean that there is no longer room for stand alone consultation activities. Provided that it is remembered that 'to consult' does not necessarily mean 'to engage', consultation activities can still be undertaken – the results can then used to inform wider community engagement activities across the Council. A useful distinction to remember is that while 'consultation' tends to be a short-term, ad hoc process that involves a one way flow of information, 'community engagement' is a long-term culture shift that involves multi-directional participation and shared decision making.

There is no one 'right' consultation method that will work for any given circumstance. All sorts of conditions influence which methods will provide useful information. It is important to understand that different methods may well produce different results: there is rarely, if ever, a single view, and consensus between all users is unlikely.

There are many methods that can be used to seek people's views. Think carefully about the following factors:

- The number of people you need/want to consult;
- Whether it is more important to get superficial opinions from a large number of people or to get more in depth views from fewer people;
- Whether the views should be representative of the wider local population;
- Whether you only want to involve certain groups or whether you can extend an open invitation to participate;
- How quickly you need the information and what you can achieve within the timescale allocated;
- What financial and human resources you have available;
- Whether you need to buy in expertise

It is also important to make sure participants are given adequate time to prepare their response. The length of time will vary depending on the time of year and the level of response that is being sought. Sufficient time should also be allowed for the results of consultation to be collated, analysed and considered, so that the results of activity will feed directly into the decision-making process. Written responses are typically sought within a 4-6 week timescale.

It can be useful to use one method to assist the development of another; for example a focus group to consider the design of a questionnaire. But when linking methods in this way, it is important to ensure that both samples are representative of the same demographic. (i.e. the focus group would need to be representative of the intended audience for the questionnaire, or their views would be less relevant). Using more than one consultation method will increase both the quality and quantity of information gathered.

Please use the table below to identify the most appropriate form of consultation for you: compare the options available whilst thinking about everything already discussed, and take note of the benefits and disadvantages of each option.

CHOOSING YOUR METHOD OF CONSULTATION ACTIVITY

A. Face to face consultation

Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages	Using this method	Likely costs
Discussion / Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies views, expectations and needs of specific target group Best environment for probing and exploring ideas. Good way of getting people from excluded community groups together. Group interaction can stimulate new ideas and thoughts and engender feelings of ownership Useful for exploring issues in depth, particularly following, or prior to, quantitative research Personal approach Provides a non-threatening environment to review sensitive issues, e.g. culture, gender, age. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not representative (small number of people) Dominant individuals can negatively impact upon group dynamics Selection of delegates can be difficult Expensive People may not turn up Requires experience of moderating groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose where a particular group's views are important and where a group has a specific interest in the topic e.g. disability groups/estate residents/ethnic minority groups/young people Ideally should consist of 6-12 participants Use to test specific proposals Needs to be effectively facilitated/ managed. Good practice to select a facilitator who is not part of the service under debate. However it is helpful for a member of staff from the service to attend for the first part of the meeting to provide details on the service and answer any queries Usually lasts between 1.5 and 2 hours. Provide enough time and information for people to make considered and informed choices – do not overwhelm people with technical data Participants can be recruited from a user group, by selecting specialist groups who are likely to be affected by any policy under review, or by contacting participants from previous focus groups who expressed an interest in further participation. You can also randomly select names from the electoral register but expect to send approximately 200 invitations for a return of 10 participants, depending on the level of interest in the topic to be discussed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Venue/ equipment hire Independent facilitator Incentives to attend Transport Carers' allowances Accessibility costs

CHOOSING YOUR METHOD OF CONSULTATION ACTIVITY

A. Face to face consultation

Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages	Using this method	Likely costs
Public meetings and roadshows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful for identifying views, expectations and needs of the community • Effective at raising public awareness of the issues and consultation processes through an initial presentation • Can take the issues to all parts of the District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not examine topics in depth • Self-selecting sample • Lobby groups can dominate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need a specific topic for discussion and something that will generate a significant level of interest among the general public • Needs to be well marketed • Can be difficult to manage – inappropriate for controversial issues • Need to ensure a mechanism for getting something concrete from the exercise. (vote, show of hands etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Venue/ equipment hire • Staff costs • Advertising & Publicity • Transport • Accessibility costs • Incentives
Household face-to-face survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High response rates • Allows for longer questionnaires and open-ended questions with fuller/more complete answers • Representative quota sample with higher degree of confidence • Allows use of visual materials • Provides quantified information for decision making purposes • Don't need to worry about people being able to read and understand written 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very high cost and time consuming • Does not include people who work in the District but are not residents • Less anonymity, therefore may not get people's true opinions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need interest in the survey topic • Need well presented, courteous interview staff • Effective quota sampling procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire design • Pilot costs • Photocopying/ printing of surveys • Interviewers • Analysis

CHOOSING YOUR METHOD OF CONSULTATION ACTIVITY

A. Face to face consultation

Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages	Using this method	Likely costs
	<p>questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can reach non-users 			
Face-to-face street interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High response rates • Allows for longer questionnaires and open-ended questions with fuller/more complete answers • Representative quota sample and higher degree of confidence • Allows use of visual materials • Provides quantified information for decision making purposes • Don't need to worry about people being able to read and understand written questions • Can reach non-users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High cost • Shorter interviews than household surveys – restricts content • Less anonymity • Difficult to ensure a representative sample • Older people and younger people less likely to participate • Spoken language barriers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need interest in survey topic • Need well presented, courteous interview staff • Short interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire design • Interviewers • Pilot costs • Photocopying • Analysis
Planning for real event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective at probing and exploring behaviour and ideas. • Good environment for priority-setting and reaching reasoned conclusions about use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves only a small selection of the population • Expensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need a small group with significant knowledge/ideas relating to the subject • Need effective facilitation and an appropriate setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Venue hire • Facilitators & staff • Transport • Accessibility costs • Invitations

CHOOSING YOUR METHOD OF CONSULTATION ACTIVITY				
A. Face to face consultation				
Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages	Using this method	Likely costs
	of budget, planning buildings and facilities			
Listening surgeries (Drop-in sessions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtains views of cross section of the community • Can use different locations • Allows use of visual displays • Relatively inexpensive • Can increase level of awareness of issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self selecting sample • Potentially low response rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose appropriate locations and advertise • service manager/staff involvement required • make effective use of displays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • venue • incentives • staff • publicity

CHOOSING YOUR METHOD OF CONSULTATION ACTIVITY				
B. Self completion and telephone questionnaires				
Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages	Using this method	Likely costs
Household postal survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Wards can be selected • Allows for open-ended questions • Provides quantified information for decision making purposes • Anonymous • High profile • Can reach non-users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response rates vary – lower response than household/ street surveys • Responses may be incomplete/ frivolous • More care needed in design • Self-selecting sample therefore biased 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need a high level of interest in the survey topic • Need to keep quite short • Need a simple/easy to complete design & layout • Postage should be paid • Think about giving a reward for responding • Use Customer Panel surveys to overcome bias and problems of self-selection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postage • Analysis • Pilot costs • Printing • Questionnaire design

CHOOSING YOUR METHOD OF CONSULTATION ACTIVITY

B. Self completion and telephone questionnaires

Household telephone survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quota sampling • Can be less expensive than face to face (however not markedly less expensive) • Quick • High response rate • Provides quantified information for decision making purposes • Able to directly key answers into computer – speeds up process • Can reach non-users • Don't need to worry about people being able to read and understand written questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey needs to be short • Answer machines/mobiles affect strike rate • No visual material • Less open-ended questions • Less anonymity • Bias in favour of those with published/accessible phone numbers (no ex-directory, no cable users) • Not all residents have telephones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need a high level of interest in the survey topic • Need well spoken, courteous interview staff • Effective quote sampling procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire design • Interviewers • Pilot costs • Analysis • Cost of phone calls
Web-based survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anonymous • Can cover users & non-users • Cheaper than postal surveys • Not location-dependent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self selecting sample – not representative • May 'miss' certain sectors of the population – i.e. those who are not IT literate • Can result in low response rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need support of IT support staff • Need to buy-in or develop in-house survey software • Need access to internet to complete 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase of software • IT support • Analysis • Publicity

CHOOSING YOUR METHOD OF CONSULTATION ACTIVITY				
B. Self completion and telephone questionnaires				
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited opportunity to provide an incentive 		
Schools/ Organisations/ clubs surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can target specific population groups Can use open ended questions Can cover whole District Provide quantified information for decision making purposes Relatively anonymous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Response varies Self selecting sample Responses may be incomplete/ frivolous More care needed in design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need a high level of interest in the survey topic Keep as short as possible Use a simple design Postage paid envelope should be provided Think about giving a reward for responding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Printing Questionnaire design Incentives Pilot Analysis Postage costs
Non-postal self completion survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anonymous Can cover users & non-users Cheaper than postal surveys Can make survey forms available at a range of outlets or through local newspaper Easy to use Council buildings and facilities for survey distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self selecting sample – not representative Can result in low response rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To make available through Council buildings need support of Council/centre based staff Need appropriate placement of posters/surveys and reply boxes Freepost address required Need a high level of interest in the topic Well designed literature/posters etc to promote Think about a reward for responding Could be distributed through normal correspondence with service users (for user views) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questionnaire design Incentives Printing Analysis Insert in newspaper Publicity

Consultation techniques: top tips

The usefulness of a consultation exercise will depend on the questions in it. It is all too easy to omit issues that are important to users, or to generate responses that do not provide the information needed to make a decision. Here are some helpful tips on developing the questions to ask:

- Keep questions succinct and relevant. Don't ask a question if you can't act on the results.
- If you need to ask complex questions use an interview-based consultation method, rather than relying on a self-completion questionnaire.
- Make sure your questions are piloted before they are used to make sure that people can understand them. Consider testing your questions on a small group. Can they understand the questions? Do you get meaningful results? Will the results help you?
- Ensure that the questions are straightforward as there may not be an expert or member of staff on hand to help the consultee (this is particularly important if they are completing a postal questionnaire)
- Questions need to be written in Plain English,
- Multiple-choice answers need to be different enough so that people can make an easy choice
- Think about whether you want the answers to your questions to be quantitative (yes/ no, multiple choice), or qualitative (where the consultee writes down their opinions or experiences in sentence form)
- An introduction to the consultation questions should assume no prior knowledge of the subject
- Don't ask two questions in the same sentence: this creates confusion
- Avoid leading questions

Once you have completed your consultation and collated the responses, you should undertake a thorough analysis of them. In analysing the results of your consultation you will need to identify priorities and highlight these in your communications, i.e. which findings do not require action such as low priority or very good results, which things can/ cannot change in the short term, which results highlight the need for greater communication.

The effectiveness of consultation should be evaluated and the results shared. Evaluation will consider not only the number of responses received but also the quality, cost and timeliness of the consultation and the overall usefulness of the results in helping to inform wider community engagement activities. Think about the following when assessing the consultation:

- How many participated?
- How representative were they in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, housing tenure, employment status etc?
- Did you reach the people who don't normally participate?
- What did participants think about the process?
- Did you get the information you wanted?
- Was the information of a good quality/sufficient depth?
- Was there any impact on decision making?

In writing a report the full range of views expressed during consultation should be acknowledged and attention drawn to areas of agreement and disagreement. The results of consultation should be weighed carefully together with other evidence and considerations before decisions are made.

Remember that accessible feedback should always be provided to participants, both on the results of consultation and on how they have been used, in order to encourage greater community engagement in the future. It is important to identify the key stakeholders, and decide the best method of communicating the results. In some cases the results of consultation will be outweighed by other evidence or considerations; in such cases a clear and honest explanation of the decisive factors should be included in the feedback.

Other considerations: Data protection and Freedom of Information

Under the Data Protection Act 1998, departments must ensure that personal data is processed fairly. Personal data in the present context will usually just mean names and addresses but, depending on the nature of the consultation, might also include other information of a personal nature that makes it possible to identify individuals. To that end, departments must ensure that certain conditions under the Act are met, notably that data subjects (consultees) give their consent to processing (publication), and that they are told the purpose or purposes for which the personal data is being processed.

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2001, individuals will have a general right to access information held by the authority, including, in principle, responses to consultation exercises, subject to certain conditions and exemptions. Relevant exemptions in this context are section 40, which exempts personal information where disclosure would infringe data principles (on which see above) and section 41, which exempts information provided in confidence.

Responsibilities

Overall responsibility of this guidance rests with the Corporate Communication Policy and Performance team. Any member of staff undertaking community engagement activities must comply with this guidance.

Date of Application

September 2008

Planned Date of Review

September 2009

Further Advice and Guidance

Please contact the Corporate Communications, Policy and Performance Team.